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Whitman's concept of brotherhood : his motivation in advocating brotherhood and the prerequisites for brotherhood

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English

WHITMAN'S CONCEPT OF BROTHERHOOD: HIS MOTIVATION IN ADVOCATING BROTHERHOOD AND THE PREREQUISITES FOR BROTHERHOOD

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Outline

Walt Whitman, the first poet-advocate of nationalistic Americanism, was also the synthesizer of a metaphysical and temporal philosophy revolving around the principal of the brotherhood of men. This principal was an organic part of all of Whitman's beliefs, facilitating the enactment of such beneficial institutions as democracy and a religion common to all men. The institution of brotherhood depends, in the same way, on the sucess of other institutions--democracy, for example:

> Manly friendship "fond and loving, pure and sweet, strong and life long, carried to degrees hitherto unknown," will be found to have "the deepest relations to general politics. I say democracy infers such loving comradeship as its most inevitable twin or counterpart, without which it will be incomplete, in vain, and incapable of perpetuating itself." [1]

There is a cause and effect relationship between brotherhood and almost all other proposals of Whitman. The relation between brotherhood and Whitman's metaphysical beliefs or religion is more complicated than a cause and effect one, and deserves more space later. With the understanding that the cause and effect situation works two ways, brotherhood both acting upon and being affected by other elements of Whitman's great plan for mankind, I shall attempt in this paper to explore these relationships from the point of view that chooses for discussion those elements that are necessities for or impediments to the institution of brotherhood. First, how-

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[1] Malcolm Cowley, "Walt Whitman: The Philosopher," New Republic, Vol. CXVII, (Sept. 29, 1947), p. 30.

ever, I intend to examine some theories concerning the reasons for Whitman's concern with brotherhood.

Whitman's conception of himself was that of the supreme brother[2] and self-appointed poet-prophet of the new brotherhood. It was his belief and brag that a Christ-like poet-prophet would bring men together into an organic union through nature:

> Trinitas divine shall be gloriously accomplish'd
> and compacted by the true son of God, the poet,
> (He shall indeed pass the straits and conquer the
> mountains,
> He shall double the cape of Good Hope to some purpose,)
> Nature and Man shall be disjoined and diffused no more,
> The true son of God shall absolutely fuse them.[3]

Certainly, this is a self-concious picture of himself, as are most idealizations of the individual in Whitman's poetry, illustrating awareness of the role which he proposed to fill. It was Whitman's purpose in playing this role (to the hilt!--yet also from the heart) to:

> . . . establish all through the United States "the institution of the dear love of comrades," which he also described as "robust American love."[4]

Thus, the desire to preach the doctrine of brotherhood can be seen as an attempt by Whitman to fill an ever-expanding ego. The playing of the prophet role gratified Whitman's ego.

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[2]Walt Whitman, "His Shape Arises . . ," in Leaves of Grass: Comprehensive Reader's Edition, ed. by Harold W. Blodgett and Sculley Bradley (New York, New York University Press, 1965), pp. 630-1.

[3]Whitman, "Passage to India," in Blodgett, pp. 415-6, ll. 110-5.

[4]Cowley, Republic, p. 30.

Malcolm Cowley suggests that another reason for Whitman's advocacy of brotherhood was homosexual impulse. There is no record of Whitman having had any overt homosexual relationship. Still it is possible that Whitman:

> . . . identified or confused homosexuality with Americanism. He said that "the main purport of these States is to found a superb friendship, exalté, previously unknown." And this strange confusion developed into a definite political program, the first of its kind since Plato: the Civil War was to be prevented, the States were to be united forever, by manly affection in all the houses, by "countless linked hands" north and south and by comradely kisses at parting in the streets.[5]

One circumstance that confuses us about Whitman's true nature is that Whitman corrected the notes of his biographer in order to maintain an organic façade. It is this inconsistency between Whitman's real self and his self-picture that makes the determination of his real nature difficult. Whitman knew that there was a discrepancy between the two--"Do you see no further than this façade. . . ?"[6]--but it is uncertain whether even he himself knew where the façade began and ended. Significantly, the quote directly preceeding is found in the "Calamus" poems--the sub-grouping of Leaves of Grass in which we find the most evidence indicative of homosexuality:

> I heard the hissing rustle of the liquid and sands as directed to me whispering to congratulate me,
> For the one I love most lay sleeping by me under the same cover in the cool night,
> In the stillness in the autumn moonbeams his face was inclined toward me,
> And his arm lay lightly around my breast--and that night I was happy.[7]

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[5] Ibid., p. 30.

[6] Whitman, "Are You the New Person Drawn toward Me?," in Blodgett, p. 123, l. 7.

[7] Whitman, "When I Heard at the Close of Day.," in Blodgett, p. 133, ll. 10-3.

Previous to the "Calamus" poems, Whitman had been the propounder of the virtues of heterosexual love and procreativeness. It is possible that Whitman could not maintain a rigid separation between the two kinds of love, hetero/procreative of "amative" and brotherly or "adhesive," and that the two combined resulted in the "Calamus" poems. The ideal of procreative love became confused with his homosexual desire.[8] A second theme of "Calamus"is the desireability of death, and it is Clark Griffith's contention that when Whitman began writing true love poetry of a homosexual nature, he had to recognise the repudiation of his former philosophical system. Thus he saw love itself as an element of destructiveness.[9] Griffith, going a step further than Cowley, thinks that Whitman's desire for a brotherhood of all men was not only motivated by homosexual desire but also marred by the recognition of his true motivation. The thing of importance, though, is their agreement on Whitman's homosexuality as motivation for his theme of brotherhood.

On the other hand, James E. Miller, Jr. proposes that the "Calamus" emotion is entirely spiritual and that Whitman recommended it as essential for the social end of democracy.[10] And it does bear repeating that there is no direct evidence that Whitman had any overt homosexual experience during his lifetime.

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[8]Clark Griffith, "Sex and Death: The Significance of Whitman's Calamus Themes," Philological Quarterly, XXXIX (Jan., 1960), p. 19.

[9]Ibid., p. 22.

[10]James E. Miller, Jr., "Whitman and Eliot: The Poetry of Mysticism," Southwest Review, XLIII (Spring, 1958), 252-3.

Another possible explanation, not mutually exclusive of the others, for Whitman's desire for brotherhood is that he felt great loneliness and therefore insecurity. W. R. B. Lewis comments on the subject of "the hero in space," saying that the aloneless created by space creates loneliness:

> And of course he was lonely, incomparably lonely; no anchorite was ever so lonely, since no anchorite was ever so alone. Whitman's image of the evergreen, "solitary in a wide, flat space. . . without a friend or lover near," introduced what more and more appears to be the central theme of American literature, in so far as a unique theme may be claimed for it: the theme of loneliness, dramatized in what I shall later describe as the story of the hero in space. The only recourse for a poet like Whitman was to fill the space by erecting a home and populating it with companions and lovers.[11]

Whitman surely does revel in open spaces:

> O to realize space!
> The plenteousness of all, that there are no bounds,
> To emerge and be of the sky, of the sun and the moon
> and flying clouds, as one with them.[12]

The poem that Lewis refers to specifically is from the "Calamus" group--"I Saw in Louisiana a Live-Oak Growing."[13] What Lewis fails to note is that Whitman states that he could not live alone as the Live-Oak; yet he is correct in extracting the symbol of loneliness from Whitman's awareness. His projection forward of the loneliness emotion to the resulting desire for brotherhood is also justifiable. On the subject

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[11] W. R. B. Lewis, "The New Adam: Holmes and Whitman," in The American Adam by Lewis (Chicago, Phoenix Books, 1966), p. 49.

[12] Whitman, "A Song of Joys.," in Blodgett, p. 181, ll. 112-5.

[13] Whitman, in Blodgett, p. 126.

of insecurity Perry Miller states that we:

> . . . are bound to recognise that [Whitman's self-conciousness] emanates not from the mood of serene self-possession and self-assurance, as Whitman blatantly orated, but rather from a pervasive self-distrust. There is a nervous instability at the bottom of his histrionic ostentation--an anxiety which foreign critics understandably call neurotic. [14]

Why Whitman should be insecure is an open question. Gay Wilson Allen suggests in his biography of Whitman, The Solitary Singer, that it was lack of parental (paternal) care. W. R. B. Lewis suggests that it was because Whitman artificially separated himself from his fellow men, acheiving only loneliness and therefore insecurity. Whatever reason it was that Whitman felt insecure--and most critics agree that he was--the insecurity was a force making Whitman want to bridge the gap of loneliness by making every person a brother.

A final reason for Whitman's advocacy of brotherhood has more relation to Whitman's theory of metaphysics than his psychological motivation. Born in 1819 and dead 1892 Whitman lived during the years of the greatest ascendancy of New England transcendentalism. Whitman differed from the other transcendentalists only in that he did not retain the puritanical belief that the soul should be elevated above the body. Thus he believed, as did Emerson and his followers, in a transcendant Oversoul or God which, though it exists outside the temporal/material world, flows through the temporal world and back into itself.[15] This Oversoul is the common, eternal soul of all

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[14]Perry Miller, "The Shaping of the American Character," New England Quarterly, XXVIII (Dec., 1955), p. 438.

[15]I have used the word "Oversoul" here even though Whitman himself does not use the word. I have done so because Whitman's concept of God corresponds with that of those who did use the word.

living things. Man participates in the Oversoul in life, and in death is reabsorbed in the common soul, losing his individuality and becoming one with all life. Whitman's insistence on the necessity of brotherhood, if not conciously influenced by his metaphysical belief, surely parallels it. It is as if, for whatever psychological reason he might have had, Whitman wished to make the material world reflect what he believed to be true about the metaphysical world. Men should interact as brothers because they are brothers in the sense that they have a common soul. In "Song of Myself" Whitman most clearly demonstrates the relation of the individual to other individuals through the common soul:

> Whoever degrades another degrades me,
> And whatever is done or said returns at last to me.
>
> Through me the afflatus surging and surging,
> through me the current and index.[16]

The word "surging" evokes the image of the Oversoul surging out of itself into the temporal world and then back into itself, relating all living things to each other as expressed in the first two lines of the excerpt. Notice, though, that Whitman's ego and his desire enter here; he emphasizes the relation of everyone to himself rather than the relation of everyone to everyone. When Whitman identifies himself with the "current," the indication is that he is taking identity with the Oversoul itself. When Whitman uses the word "index" to describe

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[16]Whitman, "Song of Myself," in Blodgett, p. 52, ll. 503-5.

himself, he is illustrating that as a member of the temporal world he is subject mankind's ills through awareness of the Oversoul. This metaphysical link that joins men in the temporal world as well as in the metaphysical world, should be acted out in the temporal world, too. If men were linked by brotherhood in the timely, material world, then with the appearance corresponding with the "reality," Whitman's metaphysical beliefs would be demonstrable. Whitman would not only escape loneliness but also be vindicated in his ideology. If Whitman's program for brotherhood was not based on his theory of metaphysics conciously, still there is an undeniable similarity between what Whitman thought should occur in the material world and what he thought did happen beyond the material world.

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Since brotherhood on the earthly plane was an institution to be achieved rather than a pre-existing state, there grew in Whitman's mind a definite plan for putting it into action. As in other such ideal institutions, there were certain prerequisites to be performed before the final goal could be achieved. The word "prerequisites" implies the negative state of impediments to the functioning of brotherhood. In discussing prerequisites and impediments to brotherhood, I may seem a bit arbitrary in calling one thing an impediment and another a prerequisite--I could almost as easily describe the opposite condition of an impediment and call it a prerequisite (and vice versa). Terminology, however, makes it easier to choose either one aspect or the other of a two sided issue and speak in terms

of the frame of reference it gives us. For example, the equality of men is one of the prime requirements for the installation of Whitman's brotherhood: "I have look'd for equals and lovers and found them ready for me in all lands,/I think some divine rapport has equalized me with them."[17] It would be acceptable to speak, in this case of, inequality as an impediment to brotherhood, but for purposes of convenience, I shall take the first point of view and mention the second only in relation to the first..

Whitman's insistence on the necessity of equality often approaches the insistence on the mediocrity of men:

> No Homer, Shakspere, Voltaire
> No palaces, Kings' palaces nor courts,
> Nor armies on the land, nor navies on the sea,
> But countless living equal men
> Average free[18]

The key word in this poem is "average." On the other hand, Whitman would almost certainly agree that the superior man was he who demonstrated his equality and his belief in brotherhood. In any case, the concern with equality is carried into several aspects of life. One of Whitman's greatest concerns is with equality of the sexes. An exponent of woman's suffrage, Whitman was concerned with the equality itself rather than gaining rights

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[17]Whitman, "Salut au Monde!," in Blodgett, p. 148, ll. 13-4.

[18]Whitman, "[America]..," in Blodgett, pp. 687-8.

deserved by reason of equality:

> The wife, and she is not one jot less than the husband,
> The daughter, and she is just as good as the son,
> The mother, and she is every bit as much as the father.[19]

Also:

> I am the poet of the woman the same as the man,
> And I say it is as great to be a woman as to be a man,
> And I say there is nothing greater than the mother of men.[20]

The emphasis in these two excerpts is not on what equality allows one to do, but on the inherent value of the person on a soul level and even on the level of sexual function.

Equality also pertains to social structure in its many aspects. Whitman says in general:

> I alone of all bards, am suffused as with the common people.
> I alone receive them with a perfect reception and love--
> and they shall receive me.[21]

Yet Whitman reaches out in brotherhood to more specific person/images than just "common people" in hopes that he will raise the underdog to the level of equality. Often he seeks to lay his brotherhood on society's lowest individual:

> To cotton-field drudge or cleaner of privies I lean,
> On his right cheek I put the family kiss,
> And in my soul I swear I will never deny him.[22]

He does not exclude the prostitute from his veneration;[23] the maltreated, the poor, the oppressed Negro, the degraded person

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[19]Whitman, "A Song for Occupations.," in Blodgett, p. 212, ll. 33-5.

[20]Whitman, "Song of Myself.," in Blodgett, p. 48, ll. 425-7.

[21]Whitman, "To the Prevailing Bards.," in Blodgett, p. 665.

[22]Whitman, "Song of Myself.," in Blodgett, p. 74, ll. 1003-5.

[23]Whitman, "To a Common Prostitute.," in Blodgett, p. 387.

are subjects of deepest solemnity,[24] because their brotherhood is not confirmed by overt action in the world. Whether Whitman is demonstrating a point or merely trying to tug at the heart-strings by popularizing the underprivileged is questionable. In defense, it can be said that Whitman didn't choose only the underprivileged as subjects for brotherhood, but also reveled emotionally in the healthy, strong and beautiful people. Still, the emphasis is on his acceptance of the oppressed and underprivileged:

> This is the meal equally set, this the meat for natural hunger,
> It is for the wicked just the same as the righteous,
> I make appointments with all.
> I will not have a single person slighted or left away,
> The kept-woman, sponger, thief, are hereby invited.
> The heavy-lipp'd slave is invited, the venerialee is invited;
> There shall be no difference between them and the rest.
>
> This is the press of a bashful hand, this the float and odor of hair,
> This the touch of my lips to yours, this the murmur of yearning,
> This the far off depth and height reflecting my own face,
> This the thoughtful merge of myself, and the outlet again.[25]

Whitman, then, wishes to grasp all strata of society into his comprehensive brotherhood--he doesn't wish to break down society and make one strata, but instead wants all people of all strata to accept each other as brothers.

However, if any man takes advantage of his brother, Whitman has a harsh word saved for him. And it was Whitman's belief that the aristocracy takes advantage of the lower classes of

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[24]Whitman, "I Sit and Look Out.," in Blodgett, p. 272-3.

[25]Whitman, "Song of Myself.," in Blodgett, p.46, ll. 372-81.

society:

> I see an aristocrat;
> I see a smoucher grabbing the good dishes exclusively to himself and grinning at the starvation of others as if it were funny,
> I gaze on the greedy hog; he snorts as he roots in the delicate greenhouse.
> How those niggers smell!
> Must that hod-boy occupy the same stage with me?
> Doth the dirt doze and forget itself?[26]

Notice, though, that here Whitman is not denouncing the aristocrat for his position in society but his unbrotherly attitude toward his social inferior. Whitman would have been greatly pleased if class structure could have been abolished--but since it was not feasable to destroy it, he was willing to accept members of all strata as equals in brotherhood. He was willing to accept, and pleaded with others to accept all levels of society as brothers, giving more tenderness to those who had received less elsewhere.

In my discussion of W. R. B. Lewis in relation to Whitman, I have perhaps only hinted at something that should be gone into in more detail. I would say that Lewis is correct in selecting space as a <u>symbol</u> for that which causes loneliness. However, the kind of space that Whitman was lost in was not physical space. He mostly dwelt among men in the city. The kind of space Whitman lost himself in was transcendental space:

> A few quadrillions of eras, a few octillions of cubic leagues, do hazard the span or make it impatient,
> They are but parts, any thing is but a part.
>
> See ever so far, there is limitless space outside of that,
> Count ever so much, there is limitless time around that

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[26] Whitman, "[I Know Many Beautiful Things]," Blodgett p. 695, ll. 3-8.

> My rendezvous is appointed, it is certain,
> The Lord will be there and wait till I come on perfect terms,
> The great Camerado, the lover true for whom I pine will be there.[27]

The loneliness came, as much as Whitman protests to the contrary, from the "quadrillions of eras" he must wait before he meets the "great Camerado" on the spiritual or metaphysical plane. Actually, physical proximity was a great prerequisite for his brotherhood:

> In folks nearest to you finding the sweetest, strongest lovingest,
> Happiness, knowledge, not in another place but this place, not for another hour but this hour,
> Man in the first you see or touch, always in friend, brother, nighest neighbor--woman in mother, sister, wife. . . .[28]

The first quote celebrates psychological closeness to be achieved in a metaphysical realm after enduring the hardships of time and space. It is in this realm that Whitman finds loneliness, for he cannot be united with God or brother while he is still on a temporal level. The second quote celebrates closeness on a physical level--to see and touch the friend and brother. The second experience is more satisfactory because it is more readily attainable. It was an error though if Whitman thought he would attain psychological closeness through physical closeness. Physical closeness is an effect of psychological closeness--not the reverse. Whitman's life is a good example of this fact--he was physically close to a great many people and yet everything he wrote emphasized his loneliness.

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[27] Whitman, "Song of Myself.," in Blodgett, pp. 82-3, ll. 1194-200.

[28] Whitman, "A Song for Occupations.," in Blodgett, p. 218, ll. 138-40.

In a poem entitled "The Sleepers," the two kinds of proximity desire are combined:

> I go from bedside to bedside, I sleep with the other sleepers each in turn,
> I dream in my dream all the dreams of the other dreamers,
> And I become the other dreamers.[29]

Surely sleeping with a person is about as close as one can can come to another person physically. Sleeping is also a function common to all people in the same way that Whitman thought brotherhood should be common to all people. The specific quote emphasizes both physical contact and the psychological oneness of dreaming the dreams of others and oven becoming the others through the dreams. The quote could also could be interpreted in a Jungian manner. The individual becomes one with the rest of his race by regressing through dreams into the collective unconcious of the race. Thus he becomes one with the deepest part of all persons--that part that exists previous to the personality-shaping influence of the environment. In any event, physical proximity as a means of growing closer psychologically and thus becoming one with your brothers, is explicit in the poem and inherent in all of Whitman's poetry.

Religion, too, can be viewed as either a stumbling block or expedient to the end of brotherhood. Orthodoxy in religion, as in all things, was to Whitman merely a wall keeping a person from seeing the true relation of man to man. In "A Song for

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[29]Whitman, in Blodgett, pp. 425-6, ll. 29-31.

Occupations." Whitman comments on the deadness of religious form compared to the living human friend:

> When the psalm sings instead of the singer,
> When the script preaches instead of the preacher,
> When the pulpit descends and goes instead of the carver
> that carved the supporting desk, . . .
> I intend to reach them my hand, and make as much of
> them as I do of men and women like you.[30]

Whitman's religion is not a Christian doctrine or sectarian ethical code. His purpose was to contain all religions and make them work together organically. He warns that:

> The measur'd faiths of other lands, the grandeurs
> of the past,
> Are not for thee, but grandeurs of thine own
> Deific faiths and amplitudes, absorbing, compre-
> hending all,
> All eligible to all.[31]

In essence, he is suggesting that no religion--Christian, Hebrew, Moslem--be followed dogmatically; rather, a person should be able synthesize a religion that encompasses all religions. An effect of this synthetic religion would be that men would not be separated from their brothers by quarrels between different sects. The desire to synthesize a religion by absorbing and comprehending all religions was a facet of Whitman's desire to encompass everything--to be a kosmos. He wanted to expand his soul, ego and experience to enclose everything. Perhaps he felt to contain all meant to lack nothing and never be lonely. Using Whitman's case as an example illustrates that expansion of the self to huge proportions seems to disjoint the self and make it unable to relate to any particular thing. Whitman could not relate to

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[30] Whitman, in Blodgett, pp. 218-9, ll. 144-151.

[31] Whitman, "Song of the Universal," in Blodgett, p. 228, ll. 48-51.

individuals but only to the gross generality of brotherhood. He could not relate to any one religion, only to religion in general--and the amorphous Oversoul. Whitman's religion, and especially the Oversoul, are accessable to all men and create no dissention between sects because of their amorphousness. Still, he is right perhaps in thinking that sects divide men. Certainly, if all men could believe in something as shapeless as Whitman's religion, it might unite them.

A very important factor that Whitman saw as necessary for brotherhood was the unity of the United States. He regarded America as the place where democracy and equality could flourish allowing men to be brothers. In "A Song for Occupations" he parallels his love for the union with his love for his fellow men:

> We thought our Union grand, and our Constitution grand,
> I do not say they are not grand and good, for they are,
> I am this day just as much in love with them as you,
> Then I am in love with you, and all my fellows upon the earth.[32]

The super-nationalism of the preface to the 1860 edition of Leaves of Grass was a reaction to forces at work which would split the States in the Civil War.[33] When the war did break out Whitman, in a seemingly uncharacteristic manner, urged

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[32]Whitman, in Blodgett, p. 214, ll. 74-8.

[33]Arthur Golden, "New Light on Leaves of Grass: Whitman's Annotated Copy of the 1860 (Third) Edition.," Bulletin of the New York Public Library, LXIX (May, 1915), p. 291.

relentless war in "Beat! Beat! Drums!";

> Beat! beat! drums!--blow! bugles! blow!
> Through the windows--through doors--burst like a ruthless force,
> Into the solemn church, and scatter the congregation,
> Into the school where the scholar is studying;
> Leave not the bridegroom quiet--no happiness must he have now with his bride. . . .
>
> Beat! beat! drums!--blow! bugles! blow!
> Make no parley--stop for no expostulation,
> Mind not the timid--mind not the weeper or prayer,
> Mind not the old man beseeching the young man,
> Let not the child's voice be heard, not the mother's entreaties,
> Make even the trestles to shake the dead where they lie awaiting the hearses,
> So strong you thump O terrible drums--so loud you bugles blow.[34]

However, on second appraisal we remember that Whitman believed that the people should be unified--that if the Union were divided, men could never relate to each other as brothers. If war became necessary in the present to preserve the United States and thus the chance for brotherhood in the future, then Whitman could encourage the present evil to gain the future good. "From Paumanok Starting I Fly Like a Bird." relates a visionary journey that Whitman makes over all the states, northern and southern, singing of and becoming the states. His true feelings on the necessity of war to preserve the Union are given in the last three lines:

> To sing first, (to the tap of the war-drum if need be,)
> The idea of all, of the Western world one and inseparable,
> And then the song of each member of these States.[35]

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[34]Whitman, in Blodgett, pp. 283-4.

[35]Whitman, in Blodgett, p. 284.

The word "member is used here in a dual sense, meaning both the individual state in relation to the other states, and the individual as related to all individuals in the other states (brotherhood). The attitude toward war though is clear: if it takes war to preserve the Union, Whitman will support the war.

After the war, around 1876, Whitman had regained completely his optimistic outlook on the possibility of brotherhood within the rejoined Union. In "Hands Round" the joining of hands becomes a symbol for both individual brotherhood made possible by the Union and the brotherhood of the Union itself:

> See! see! where the sun is beaming!
> See! see! see! all the bright stars, gleaming!
> See by day how the sun is beaming
> See by night all the far stars gleaming
> What the charm of Power unbroken?
> What the spell of ceaseless token?
> ? O its hand in hand, & a Union of all
> What Columbia's ? friendliest token?
> 'Tis the hands we take for the Union of all
> Here's mine--give me thine--for the Union of all
> What Columbia's friendliest token?
> All hands round for the Union of all!
> Here's mine--give me thine--for the Union all. . .
>
> Northward, Southward, Westward moving. . .
> Clasping, circling earthward, heavenward!
> Onward! onward! onward! onward! . . .
> Then our hands here we give for the Union all!
> O its all hand round--and each for all![36]

A final necessity for the institution of brotherhood is more a manner of acting than an action itself to be performed; and for this reason it is one of the most important. Whitman

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[36]Whitman, in Blodgett, pp. 673-4.

demands spontenaity of those who would be brothers:

> Allons! the road is before us!
> It is safe--I have tried it--my own feet have tried it well--be not detain'd!
> Let the paper remain on the desk unwritten, and the book on the shelf unopen'd!
> Let the tools remain in the workshop! let the money remain unearn'd!
> Let the school stand! mind not the cry of the teacher!
> Let the preacher preach in his pulpit! let the lawyer plead in the court and the judge expound the law.
>
> Camerado, I give you my hand!
> I give you my love more precious than money,
> I give you myself before preaching or law;
> Will you give me yourself? will you come travel with me?
> Shall we stick by each other as long as we live?[37]

One must be willing to give up all else and act spontaneously according to his brotherly desire. When Whitman sees lack of spontaneity within himself he chastises himself:

> Oh I have been dilatory and dumb,
> I should have made my way straight to you long ago,
> I should have blabb'd nothing but you, I should have chanted nothing but you.[38]

The gist is that a man cannot be a brother unless he throws off inhibition to declare his love for his brother. He entreats others to exercise impulses towards brotherhood: "Whoever you are! claim your own at any hazzard."[39] The claiming of one's own (real self?) is urged in general and especially when it applies to brotherhood. In this case, perserverence in one's spontaneity is advised.

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[37]Whitman, "Song of the Open Road.," in Blodgett, pp. 158-9, ll. 214-24.

[38]Whitman, "To You.," in Blodgett, p. 233, ll. 9-11.

[39]Ibid., p. 235, l. 39.

The interesting part of this is that with all his encouragement of spontaneity, Whitman himself could not be spontaneous. The inconsistency between his real self and the self-image he had created through his poetry made him constantly aware of himself. He had to think always of whether his action would conform to his image of himself. Thus he was one of most affected of persons--in his dress he affected the costume of a common worker. In his poetry he took on the usage of Quaker expressions though he had never been remotely related to the Quaker sect. When he speaks of himself as a spontaneous, carefree individual, it is with an air of nostalgia--suggesting that his concern with spontaneity is based on the concern with not having it. Paradoxically, he killed his spontaneity through his self-awareness of it. Conversely, it may be that his own lack of spontaneity made him aware of its necessity for brotherhood: He was not yet spontaneous and he had not yet acheived a sense of brotherhood, therefore it follows that sponaneity is very likely a requirement for brotherhood. Whatever the psychological implications of Whitman's advocacy of spontaneity, it remains that spontaneity is probably the prime requirement for brotherhood because it affects positively all that which Whitman thought would lead to brotherhood.

Throughout his life, Whitman continued to write about those things which promote or impede brotherhood. Although I have not followed his poetry chronologically, it might be

well to mention that the emphasis in his early poetry was on how the different elements (such as democracy) affected brotherhood. In his later poetry the emphasis lay on the element as a principal in itself. However, Whitman still related the same elements as he did in his youth, but does not emphasize the cause and effect relationship.

On the question of originality, Whitman has a few defenders.[40] Nevertheless, Whitman owes much of his theory to eastern religions, especially Hindustani, and to the German philosophers. His theory of brotherhood is much like Emerson's. Emerson thought in terms of man's limitless potential to escape the demands of the body into those of the spirit of man's brotherhood; Whitman's similar message was the ecstacy of joining the two elements of the self and a wider recognition of the essential brotherhood of man, giving man limitless potential.[41] The difference is that the material self was not to abase itself before the spiritual self in Whitman's universe. Whitman affirmed the simultaneous growth of individual personality and the cosmic relationship. He thus affirmed brotherhood on a physical basis in the world. D. H. Lawrence, despite belaboring Whitman in other areas, calls him ". . . the first heroic seer to seize the soul by the scruff of her neck and plant her down

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[40] Fred Manning Smith, "Whitman's Poet-Prophet and Carlyle's Hero," PMLA, LV (Dec., 1940), p. 1146.

[41] Leon Howard, "For a Critique of Whitman's Transcendentalism," Modern Language Notes, XLVII (Feb., 1932), p. 81.

among the potsherds."[42] In giving credit to Whitman for this bit of originality, Lawrence is also affirming the fact that Whitman had equal regard for the physical and spiritual side--of brotherhood. For certainly Whitman recognised a physical and a spiritual side to brotherhood. Whitman's originality does not lie in the fact that he thought of anything new, though, but rather in the way he arranged items together that had not before been associated.

Finally, Whitman should be remembered for his attempt to amalgamate all facets of life, spiritual and physical, into an organic philosophy centered around the principle of the brotherhood of men:

> . . . Love the earth and the sun and the animals, despise riches, give alms to everyone who asks, stand up for the stupid and the crazy, devote your income and labor to others, hate tyrants, argue not concerning God, have patience and indulgence toward the people, take off your hat to nothing known or unknown or to any man or number of men, go freely with powerful uneducated persons and with the young and with the mothers of families, read these leaves in the open air every season of every year of your life, re-examine all that you have been told at school or in church or in any book, dismiss whatever insults your own soul, and your very flesh shall be a great poem. . . .[43]

With all the faults we can find in Whitman himself and in his work, still there is the magnanimity of purpose that catches our attention. Whitman's ideal transcends any ulterior motives that he might have had; for most of us recognise that brotherhood

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[42] D. H. Lawrence, Studies in Classic American Literature (New York, Thomas Seltzer, 1923), p. 255.

[43] Whitman, "Preface to the 1855 edition," in Blodgett, pp. 714-5, ll. 200-09.

is a state to be desired. The effecting of overt action in brotherhood was a tremendous undertaking, and we should not be too harsh with Whitman for being unable to attain his goal.

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